

# NEWS RELEASE



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**RACINE COUNTY EXECUTIVE JONATHAN DELAGRAVE'S  
2016 STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS  
May 24, 2016**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board of Supervisors, Youth In Governance representatives, distinguished guests, and residents of Racine County;

I am honored to present MY SECOND State of the County Address.

We have made great strides. The learning curve has been steep, but I remain humbled and honored to be your County Executive. This year – and over the course of 15 years in Racine County government – I have learned “the things that divide us are far less important than those that connect us.” (Rachel Naomi Remen) Each connection I have made has contributed to my growth as a leader.

Surely we can agree that a chief responsibility of the county executive is to be a good steward of tax dollars entrusted to the government; to manage the delivery of services as efficiently and smoothly as possible; and to forge a vision that makes a better and brighter future for Racine County and its residents.

I am reminded, however, of the words: “Vision is not enough, it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps, we must step up the stairs.” (Vaclav Havel) One year ago, I stood before you and outlined a vision centered around three priorities: creating a Racine County Ready Workforce; improving mental health services;

and investing in economic growth and the development of the I-94 corridor. I am proud to report that, in my first year, we have made significant gains on all three fronts.

Progress in each area was made possible by creative staff and collaboration with you, the County Board. Together, we have supported a vision, provided necessary resources, and adapted to evolving circumstances. Thank you for your support and partnership.

Speaking of vision, last week we renamed Harbor Park and celebrated a man who demonstrated great foresight and courage. Len Ziolkowski had a passion to develop the marina for the benefit of downtown Racine. He worked, collaborated, and fought for his vision with a conviction that it just made sense. Now, 30 years later, we cannot imagine our lakefront without the beautiful marina. Racine County owes Len a profound debt and we owe it to him, when faced with difficult decisions, to do better.

In that spirit, with clear eyes and the understanding that change is not always easy, expected, or welcome, especially in local government, tonight, I'll outline some major changes aimed at moving Racine County forward.

As you know, our Human Services Department has faced two unexpected and daunting challenges in just the past couple months. One: a potentially-devastating flood. The other: a medical diagnosis that has touched us all. However, it is often in the moment of most profound doubt and darkest of times that hope emerges. Within 24 hours of the flood at the Dennis Kornwolf Service Center, Human Services staff found a new space to continue our vital SAIL program, created continuity of services, and had a plan for the aftermath. As for our own hope, Hope Otto's diagnosis of breast cancer reminds us how suddenly lives can shift course. Her department and the County as a whole have stepped up as Hope works from home while receiving chemo treatments. A special thanks to Michelle Goggins, Adult Services manager, and Kerry Milkie, Youth and Family Division manager, for their quick thinking and steady leadership.

In furtherance of our vision for Racine County, we are rolling out a new Racine County brand. The brand is much more than a logo. It is a recognition of the maxim that "[y]our brand is the single most important investment you can make...." (Steve Forbes) To be most effective, we must raise awareness of the programs and work we do on behalf of the community. Branding is crucial to these efforts.

Our brand embodies innovation, growth, justice, heritage, land, and water. It represents innovation, trust, and moving forward.

Racine County will officially launch its new website, RacineCounty.com, this summer. It incorporates a fresh look, improves navigation, includes new interactive tools, is mobile-friendly, and contains content that is easy to understand. This new website welcomes residents, businesses and visitors to engage with Racine County.

Thank you to our new Information Technology Director, John Barrett, for his skilled management. And thank you to all who helped with this project: the IT department as a whole, the County-wide steering committee, and our online government experts, Vision Internet, who designed the website to reflect our vision.

The Workforce Development Center has undergone a re-branding of its own with a new name and logo, WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS. The mission of Workforce Solutions is to provide services that are dynamic, changing, and continually improving to meet the needs of our customers, business partners, and community members. This speaks to our commitment to spark community growth by ensuring that people have the skills and supportive services to realize their career goals.

I am especially proud of a few key Workforce Solutions initiatives that will be our focus in the coming year. First, to reduce the number of individuals without high school diplomas. Partnering with RUSD High School Transformation project and Higher Expectations, we are committed to improving graduation rates and academic success.

Over 7,000 City of Racine residents lack high school credentials and continually face closed doors of opportunity. The Workforce Solutions Team utilizes continuous improvement/LEAN practices to address GED outreach and attainment. Through partnerships with Gateway Technical College, Lakeshore Library Systems, and all area public libraries, we will improve access to job training resources, implement a customer tracking system, increase our outreach efforts and move the needle on GED attainment. This will increase the marketability of local residents and enable them to continue their education and/or land family sustaining jobs.

Another example of making our workforce “work-ready,” is our new Workplace Excellence Series. Under the leadership of Sarah Street, our Workforce Development Program Manager, we now offer a robust “soft skills” curriculum integrated into our menu of services available to job seekers and business. These sessions can be modified to meet the needs of employers and are led by certified facilitators.

Through these partnerships, we are happy to announce that any resident with a library card or an easily-accessible Workforce Solutions code will be able to access over 300 instructor-led, online Gale courses for free. These are great examples of collaboration between government entities that create economies of scale, save money, and focus on a common goal: creating a Racine County Ready Workforce.

Allow me to share a testimonial that touched my heart. When Karen Eastman RSVP'd for her son's graduation from this year's High School CNC boot camp, her note read, "I know Nathaniel has not only enjoyed this amazing opportunity but has matured and gained friends and excellent experience that he has embraced into a new life. I would like to thank you and this dynamic program for allowing this to occur. He can truly begin his career immediately with defined confidence, focus and drive."

Nate attends Union Grove High School, and after graduation, he must decide between an apprenticeship at Fischer Precise or continuing his education at Gateway Technical College with a \$2500 annual scholarship. Either way, this young man is a winner. I'm so happy we were able to help him, and look forward to many more success stories like his.

In a recent marketing audit, the most common feedback we received is that people simply aren't aware of all that we do. We are committed to changing that. Branding efforts and improved services are critical to reaching people in need, who, like Nate Eastman, will benefit the community and make us all proud.

Our Detention Center, under Interim Director Ed Kamin, is making strides to improve and innovate rehabilitation strategies. Working with a consortium of community leaders and partners to develop a library in the Juvenile Detention facility, we have received donations of over 400 books already, and continue to actively solicit book and board game donations. We aim to have this new space open by July 2016.

There are also many in our community in dire need of mental health services. It is a passion of mine to answer that challenge and we've had great success. In only its third full year of operation, almost 9,500 people obtained vital services from our Behavioral Health Services programs and 6,830 by the hotline. Combined, this accounts for a staggering number – nearly 8% of the County's population – who would otherwise remain in darkness.

Since opening, Behavioral Health Services has increased Substance Abuse services 605%, Mental Health counseling 648%, Outpatient Mental Health Services 252%, Crisis Services 155%, Hotline calls 687%, SAIL Admissions 224%, SAIL Days of Care 274%. At the same time, Emergency Detentions dropped from 462 in 2012, to 199 in 2015: a 67% reduction.

These are great outcomes and I thank Human Services Director Hope Otto for her dedication, hard work, and unfailing inspiration.

It is our responsibility to not rest on these strides alone. We must improve capacity and the space used for services. We must work closely with community partners to provide a continuum of care for individuals in need. We know that expanding the number of clinicians within Behavioral Health Services is needed. We are also committed to implementing a Mental Health Diversion Program with the lead of Judge Tim Boyle and the Racine County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee. I firmly believe that through our actions toward those in need of mental health services, we can stir the dormant goodwill in others.

Thank you also to Jeff Leggett and his team at Child Support Enforcement for another banner year. Child Support Enforcement exceeded its goals on all four of the federal performance measures for child support. This means more financial support to children and families, enabling the County to take better advantage of federal and state funding while minimizing the impact on the tax levy.

Recent success is also attributable to the new Child Support hearing room on Taylor Ave and its proximity to Workforce Solutions. This gives delinquent payers immediate access to the tools needed to find jobs and pay child support, and helps achieve efficiency with same day enrollment. We have seen an enrollment increase of 80% and improvement in payments. During the 1st quarter, child support payments have increased 138%. Average wages are up almost \$1.00 an hour.

As County Executive, I meet with business and community leaders who share the commitment to make Racine County a great place to live, to work, and to visit. Part of my job is simply getting out of the way of these motivated leaders so they can get on with the business of creating success.

In part, this means continuing our partnership with Racine County Economic Development Corporation (RCEDC) to promote business expansions and new economic opportunities. Our valuable partnership with RCEDC is a model for public/private

collaboration, and I have continued to commit \$1 million of the County budget to a Revolving Loan Fund administered by RCEDC.

Racine County is making real, tangible progress in the area of economic growth. Caledonia will finish its utility project in October 2016, opening up hundreds of acres of land at Highway K and I-94. Thanks to two developers, Land and Lakes and Ashley Capital, Racine County now has more than 500,000 square feet of Class A industrial building space available. BRP recently announced that their Sturtevant location was chosen as the company's Global Training Center. Upon completion, this project will provide more employment opportunities and bring hundreds of visitors annually to Racine County. Applied Materials Solutions (AMS) is undertaking \$3.7M in building renovations and will create 147 new jobs in Burlington.

These are just a few of the many notable economic development projects completed in 2015 or started in 2016. These projects, in partnership with RCEDC, will result in more than \$80 million in private investment and will create more than 375 new jobs for Racine County.

A key and steady component to all of Racine County's success, stability, and vision is the expertise and dedication of our Finance Department. Under the stewardship of our new Director, Alex Tillman, the Finance Department was awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the seventh consecutive year.

Racine County's financial position is as strong, solid, and consistent as it's ever been, and will remain strong due to conservative budgeting and healthy reserves. Moody's Investor Services has reaffirmed our double A 1 (AA1) bond rating; the second highest rating given. Our sound bond rating by Moody's means we pay a lower rate of interest on money borrowed for capital projects, saving our taxpayers money. Our fund balance is extremely healthy, with reserves at a consistent rate of 20-25 percent of annual budgeted expenditures since 2007. This has been achieved without tax increases for the past six years, and it allows us to maintain financial stability without reducing services.

In March, Racine County signed a seven year contract with Tyler Munis to update our financial software technology. Our current system is outdated and does not support the modern financial and human resources applications needed to accommodate future growth. The new model will allow multiple departments to use one comprehensive system to access financial management, payroll, and HR applications with ease. The Finance Department is in the process of implementing Munis with a "go live" goal date of January 2017.

On the topics of vision, drive, and forward-thinking, congratulations to Julie Anderson, Director of Public Works and Development Services, and Register of Deeds, Tyson Fettes, for their proactive upgrade to ARC GIS online. This means that the Register of Deeds System talks to the tax system, which now talks to the GIS: a great example of LEAN government. Reducing unnecessary and duplicate work allows for documents recorded in the Register of Deeds office to be changed on the tax roll and the map updated in less than a week.

This commitment to efficient government has expanded public facing information such as the Recent Sales application, Sheriffs and Treasurers Foreclosure Application, and a survey application showing all 70,000 plats of survey in the County.

These advancements have garnered national attention. Racine County will be honored with a Special Achievement in GIS Award at the ESRI International Conference in San Diego in July. Racine County was selected out of 100,000 applicants nominated. Outstanding work!

Other highlights from our Public Works and Development Services Department include budgetary savings of nearly \$500,000, an increase in zoning permits which reflect an improving economy, and the resurfacing of four County highways in 2015.

An embodiment of those famous words: our County parks are "the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst." (Wallace Stegner) We entrust the parks team and a dedicated group of employees with the care of these most special places.

Quarry Lake water levels are being reduced to expose the lower beach. Two new canoe/kayak launches are in place in Case Eagle Park in Rochester. We have applied for a grant to rebuild the bathhouse located at Einer Fischer Park on Browns Lake.

Reef Point Marina also has enjoyed continued growth and improvements over the past year. Among the many highlights, Reef Point doubled their revenue from Transient Boat Slip Rentals, increased the selection and inventory in the Ship Store, and remodeled the pool, hot tubs, and adjoining patio area.

Of course, while enjoying all the benefits of Racine County, we need to keep our residents safe, and must provide the tools to accomplish that crucial task. To that end, Sheriff Chris Schmaling and I decided to invest in the technology of body cameras for Racine County's Sheriff Office patrol deputies and jail personnel. Body cameras (BWC) are small devices that record interactions between community members and law enforcement officers. The video and audio can document statements, observations, behaviors, and other evidence; and deter unprofessional, illegal, and inappropriate behaviors by both law enforcement and the public. Body worn cameras have proven to cause an overall reduction in complaint investigations, litigation, and lawsuit payouts. Most important, they foster strong, collaborative relationships between local law enforcement and the communities they protect. We project that body cameras will be integrated into patrol and the jail in November 2016.

I have spoken at great length this evening about vision. About being a good steward of your tax dollars balanced with the needs of our community. Sometimes, this means making tough decisions. It means making a decision with an eye on the future.

Your vote on the future of Ridgewood Care Center is one of those decisions. This is the moment when I ask you to vote with an eye focused squarely on the future. Engaging a broker reflects foresight, keen logic, and thoughtful analysis of the sustainability options for Ridgewood.

We have vision, but, remember, vision is not enough. We must act. Together, we must step up the stairs on this venture, for the backbone of our actions is our shared responsibility to the nearly 200,000 residents of Racine County. We have adapted to changing environments. We have made financially sound decisions in the face of adversity. As partners, we will continue to move Racine County forward.

Thank you.

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